



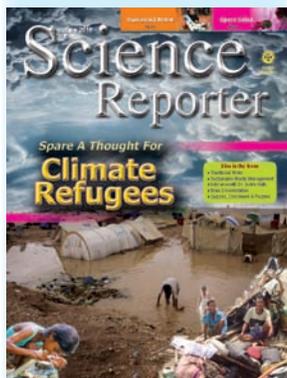
Science Reporter

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MAKE EVERY DROP COUNT

Parched lands & fields, dried-up streams & rivers, men and women scrounging for drops of water in dirty drains and wells, fights breaking out over distribution of water brought in tankers – all this did not make for pleasant viewing and reading in the media during the past few days. With almost 40% of the country reeling under drought conditions, even Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had to exhort people to start a mass campaign to conserve water.

Habituated to the comforts of city life and an assured supply of water, many of us, perhaps, fail to understand the perplexity, befuddlement and misery of people denied access to as mundane a commodity as water. Of course, given our penchant for wasting water, encroaching on natural water bodies, polluting the rivers, and following water-intensive agricultural practices we have managed to transform a mundane commodity into one of the most precious resources of our times.

The situation is only going to worsen with time. The recent World Water Development Report by the United Nations has projected that India's demand for water is likely to surpass availability by 2050. But even in these despondent times, one comes across several instances of prudent water conservation and harvesting measures from around the country that should keep our hopes alive.

One such story is that of the villagers of Ufrenkhal in Uttarakhand who have transformed what was once a dry ravine and a firing range into a gurgling river. For nearly 30 years the villagers dug small percolation pits on slopes and planted grass immediately downhill of the pit to protect its edges. The water thus retained infiltrated into the soil, replenishing the groundwater and even creating a river. Today this region is covered with lush green forests and the river meets all the water requirements.

In Sikkim, where springs are dying due to environmental and human-induced reasons, as part of a state government initiative communities have constructed trenches at distances of 20 feet uphill and 8-10 feet downhill. The rain water that until now used to flow down the hills unchecked is now trapped in these trenches making the region self-sufficient in water.

Another community initiative that revived a dried-up river is that of the farmer community of Junagadh located in Saurashtra, Gujarat. The community joined hands to build check dams that now store large quantities of water sufficient to cater to the needs of the village year-round. The farmers have also adopted sustainable ways to conserve water by using drip irrigation and sprinklers to irrigate their farms.

Another inspiring story is that of Hiware Bazar in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra which was once plagued by alcoholism, violence and drought. But not until the villagers took on the challenge of water conservation seriously by not only changing the cropping pattern, but also taking initiatives like drip irrigation, water harvesting and water recharging. The villagers built 52 earthen bunds, two percolation tanks, 32 stone bunds and nine check dams. Today, Hiware Bazar is a rich and prosperous village.

There are many such inspiring stories of villages and communities getting together to tackle their water woes. It is such initiatives that need to be encouraged, promoted and replicated throughout the country.

But each one of us too has a role to play in preserving the precious water. There needs to be a realisation and a conscious effort to ensure that we are not a party to the crime of water wastage. Equally important is to get together wherever we are and put in efforts to nurture and maintain natural water bodies around us.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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